

2015

# Is What Is Past Always Prologue? Priming to Past Conflicts and Fear of Terrorism Influence Americans' Support for Military Intervention in Syria

Daniel Walter Snook II  
*University of North Florida*

---

## Suggested Citation

Snook, Daniel Walter II, "Is What Is Past Always Prologue? Priming to Past Conflicts and Fear of Terrorism Influence Americans' Support for Military Intervention in Syria" (2015). *UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 561.  
<https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/561>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at UNF Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UNF Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Digital Projects](#).

© 2015 All Rights Reserved

Is What Is Past Always Prologue? Priming to Past Conflicts and Fear of Terrorism Influence

Americans' Support for Military Intervention in Syria

Daniel Snook

University of North Florida

**Abstract**

Implicit knowledge influences decision-making in a variety of areas, including conflict resolution and decisions about war. Individuals may unknowingly apply implicit knowledge from past experiences to present experiences, even if that information leads to less accurate decisions in the present experience. The current study is an exploration into how implicit knowledge of past international conflicts and fear of terrorism affects recommendations for military conflict resolution in current international conflicts. Priming is one way to make implicit knowledge salient, and participants in this study were implicitly primed to think of either the Iraq War, World War II, or no war in particular before reading a description of the Syrian Civil War. Participants reported their recommendations for resolving the conflict in Syria, including to what extent they would recommend that the United States intervene using military force. Fear of Terrorism, which is theoretically linked to knowledge and attitudes about Middle Eastern conflicts, was also measured. Results showed that support for U.S. military intervention in Syria was significantly impacted by Fear of Terrorism when participants had been primed to think of the Iraq War. This effect was such that, when primed to think of the Iraq War, higher Fear of Terrorism predicted greater support for military intervention in Syria. This effect did not occur in the other priming conditions. This study extends current research by examining how implicit priming of past conflicts and fear of terrorism interact to influence Americans' decision-making in support for military intervention in Middle Eastern conflicts.

Is What Is Past Always Prologue? Priming to Past Conflicts and Fear of Terrorism Influence  
Americans' Support for Military Intervention in Syria

Wisdom holds that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, but lessons from the past do not always apply to present circumstances. Histories, both personal and collective, give each individual a unique understanding of their world and provide resources for the decisions they face. Individuals' past experiences are known to influence outcomes in various facets of life, such as the accuracy of decisions in economic decision-making and in social behaviors, such as discrimination (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; North, 1994; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Past experiences vary in their practical relevance when applied to current circumstances.

Humans commonly use the knowledge accumulated and consolidated throughout the lifespan in making judgments and decisions (Kahneman & Tversky, 1974; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). However, using knowledge gained from past experience to make judgments and decisions in new situations can lead to invalid judgments. Using past experiences to make future judgments is problematic when individuals are unaware of the effects that knowledge of past outcomes have on current perceptions (Fischhoff, 1975). Fischhoff (1975), for example, found that when participants knew a particular outcome had occurred in a past event, they perceived that outcome to be more likely to occur again in a different event, even if those events were unrelated. Moreover, the participants were unaware of the impact that this knowledge had on their perceptions. Similarly, Schwenk (1988) demonstrated that people experience the illusion of control when they have experienced success in their past decisions. The use of unconscious collections of past experiences, referred to as implicit knowledge, is associated with a number of

biases, including biased emotions and distorted memories (Kahneman & Riis, 2005; Khatri & Ng, 2000).

### **Implicit Cognition and Priming**

In many real-world situations, the use of past experiences provides benefits, such as ease in decision-making in a new setting. The ease of decision making, however, usually requires a loss of accuracy. Humans use mental shortcuts through a process of implicit cognition to make decisions quickly. Implicit cognition involves associated memories of past experiences that shape decision-making and behavior (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Kahneman & Riis, 2005). Implicit cognition influences preferences, views, and attitudes in areas related to one's cumulative experiences. Implicit association tests (IATs), for example, measure how implicit cognition impacts attitudes and behaviors (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Although researchers have used the IAT in a variety of contexts, the clearest application of the IAT has been in revealing subtle and unconscious racial prejudices (Greenwald, et al., 1998). Thus, the use of implicit cognition typically leads to bias rather than accuracy, but people use implicit cognition because of efficiency.

Implicit cognition operates by establishing neural connections between elements of past experiences and related concepts. Connections between elements of past experience and conceptual knowledge become strengthened with use and weakened with disuse (Bauer, 1999). The strengthening of neural connections among elements of past experiences and conceptual knowledge allows for many cognitive effects.

Priming effects (Meyer & Schvaneveldt, 1971) and spreading activation theory (Collins & Loftus, 1975; Quillian, 1962) delineate how information from past experiences can be activated among neural networks when making new decisions. The phenomenon of priming

occurs when one encounters one stimulus and this stimulus facilitates the processing of subsequent stimuli that are either the same as the first stimulus (i.e., direct priming) or conceptually related to the first stimulus (i.e., indirect priming; Tulving, Schacter, & Stark, 1982). For instance, participants were more quickly able recognize the word “nurse” when they had already been primed with the related word “doctor” (Friederici, Steinhauer, & Frisch, 1999).

Semantic and conceptual priming refer to meaning and function rather than the structural or surface-level elements of a situation. For instance, individuals are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior when primed with images of weapons (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967). This effect is due to the accessibility of the second concept, aggression, following the introduction of the first concept, a weapon. The priming effect occurs because of the conceptual proximity or similarity of these stimuli in neural activation networks. The neural networks automatically activate stimuli that share a semantic connection, a connection based on meaning (Schvaneveldt & Meyer, 1973).

The processes of semantic priming have practical implications for determining behavior. Research indicates that semantic priming for implicit knowledge influences decision-making and impacts behavioral choices. Implicit priming of God concepts, for example, increases pro-social behaviors, such as donating to those in need (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Implicit priming also impacts strategic social decision-making. Participants who experienced implicit priming to angry faces were less likely than those primed to neutral faces to engage in social approach behavior (Van’tWout & Sanfey, 2008). The implicit activation of the conceptual meaning of a past experience can influence one’s interpretation of a new experience, impacting decisions in a new context.

**Priming and Military Decision-Making**

Semantic priming allows for current decisions to be influenced by prior situations that are similar to the situation at hand. Priming to prior experience with war influences individuals' tendency to support or oppose war. In recent decades, the United States (U.S.) has become involved in a number of overseas conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. These past experiences with war could influence the decisions of U.S. citizens to either support or oppose U.S. military intervention in similar conflicts.

Gilovich (1981) states that humans tend to make associations from past experiences to present experiences based on decision-making criteria, such as availability or current saliency, even if the criteria are not actually applicable to the present experience. Participants who were primed to think of World War II reported higher levels of support for war as a resolution strategy for a hypothetical conflict compared to participants who were primed to think of the Vietnam War (Gilovich, 1981). Despite the fact that the hypothetical conflict for both groups was nearly identical, those primed to think of World War II were more willing to support military intervention. Simply by presenting the stimulus situation of a war in which military intervention was well-supported and successful (i.e., World War II), participants increased their support for war when faced with a new conflict compared to those primed with a war in which military intervention was poorly-supported and unsuccessful (i.e., the Vietnam War). Priming participants with memories of past conflicts, however, introduces another factor in human judgment, threat salience.

**Priming, Threat Salience, and Past Conflicts**

In making decisions about a conflict, an individual weighs salient threats associated with supporting their nation's involvement in that conflict against those associated with not

intervening. Threat salience is the level of awareness or attention an individual gives to a particular threat. Salience of the threat of nuclear war, for example, is associated with worrying about nuclear war and thinking about the ramifications of nuclear war more frequently (Mayton, 1987). Implicit priming to a specific past conflict will activate the semantic networks for that conflict and, through the process of spreading activation, makes the threats associated with that conflict salient as well. Most Americans supported World War II, for example, because the threat of Hitler and the Axis Powers dominating Europe was more salient for them than the threat of losing American lives and resources in the war effort. Therefore, priming participants to World War II made them more likely to recommend intervention in a new conflict (Gilovich, 1981).

All wars produce threats. Support or opposition for war is determined by the salience of the threats associated with one's group engaging or avoiding war based on those threats' relative accessibility in memory networks and their perceived immediacy within the context (Berinsky, 2007; Duntley & Buss, 2004; Feaver & Gulpi, 2004; Gartner, 2008; Mueller, 1973). As the United States engages in a number of military conflicts, American citizens provide support for the war if the threats salient with the war outweigh the perceived costs.

The Iraq War, for example, was initially well supported by the U.S. public. Public support for war in Iraq was based in part on the assumption that military action would eliminate the threat of Saddam Hussein and his potential use of weapons of mass destruction. Another motivation for armed conflict in Iraq was the continued search for and destruction of terrorist cells that had groomed the terrorists responsible for 9/11, including Osama Bin Laden (Bamford, 2005). In 2003, 85% of Americans supported the invasion of Iraq (Pew Research Center, 2003). Since that time, however, there has been "broad agreement among U.S. foreign policy experts, as well as much of the American public and the international community, that the threat



assessments that President George W. Bush and his administration used to justify the war against Iraq were exaggerated” (Kaufmann, 2006, pg. 97). As a result of lack of salient threats, support for the Iraq war decreased. In 2014, 75% of Americans believed involvement in the Iraq War was not worth the cost (CBS/New York Times, 2014). Perceived salience of threats has powerfully influenced support for military action in past U.S. conflicts.

Some researchers argue that salient existential threats influence support for war. Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) suggests that people are far more likely to support war when their own mortality salience, or the extent to which one understands they may be killed, is increased (Chatard, et al., 2011; Landau, et al., 2004; Willer, 2004). This suggests that individuals will be more likely to support war when the salience of existential threats is high, especially when they or a loved one may be killed in conflict. The balance of threat salience shifts towards support for war and military intervention if individuals feel as though they have more to lose, either their life or the meaning they have ascribed to their existence.

### **Fear of Terrorism and Support for War**

Fear of terrorism likewise has been linked historically and theoretically to support for war (Altheide, 2006; Borgeson, 2009; Friedland & Merari, 1985; Victoroff, 2005). Although increased fear of terrorism is theoretically related to increased support for war, existing empirical results are mixed. Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav (2005), for example, found evidence that those with greater *perceived threat* of terrorism were more supportive of aggressive military action against terrorist groups, but those with greater *anxiety* about terrorism were less supportive of military action against terrorist groups. Anxiety over terrorism seems to increase risk aversion, which stifles a support for military action, whereas the perceived threat of

terrorism increases support for military action in an attempt to reduce the possibility of attack from a threatening enemy (Huddy, et al., 2005). Friedland and Merari (1985) empirically demonstrated that fear of terrorism is directly related to support for counterterrorism measures, including military action such as bombing of terrorist bases (even if it may injure civilians) and assassination of terrorist leaders. Counterterrorism, however, poses less threat to human lives than does military involvement in full-scale war. The threat of war that involves the threat of attacks from terrorist actors likely enhances threat salience.

Fear of terrorism impacts how an individual perceives and assesses the salience of threats associated with a war, usually increasing the threat of opposing war (Altheide, 2006; Nellis, 2009). Altheide (2006) states that those with greater fear of terrorism are more easily convinced of the necessity of war and of the dangers that will accompany not taking military action in territory where terrorist groups may reside. This proposed relationship between fear of terrorism and increased support for war, however, has yet to be shown empirically.

### **Americans' Support for the Syrian Civil War**

Fear of terrorism and perceived threat of terrorism has played an especially important role in support for recent Middle Eastern conflicts. In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Americans' perspectives on Middle Eastern extremist groups have changed drastically. The American public's high fear of terrorism in the years immediately following 9/11 has kept the threat of terrorism salient (Crowson, Debacker, & Thoma, 2006), justifying for some military action in the region believed to be harboring those responsible. Since 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, any Middle Eastern conflicts are likely to remind the American people of the threat of terrorist attacks (DeCastella & McGarty, 2011). Terror attacks of Middle Eastern origin are salient and persistently frightening to Americans because, although the conflict itself is

far from American soil and civilians, terror attacks are long distance and unexpected by their nature (Marshall, et al., 2007). Even subliminal references to 9/11 raise people's perceived levels of threat and thoughts of death (Landau, et al., 2004). Fear of terrorism increases the salience of threats for past U.S. conflicts in the Middle East. This increase in threat salience should increase support for wars that are associated with terrorism, such as the Iraq War, or those that are similar to prior conflicts associated with terrorism.

In August 2013, Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad used chemical weapons against Syrian rebel forces and Syrian civilians (United Nations, 2013). This escalation to the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War compelled the United States government to decide whether to use military force to intervene. In September of 2013, President Barack Obama strongly advocated for airstrikes on Syrian targets, which would have marked the official beginning of U.S. military support to anti-Assad rebels. However, public opinion, as well as the opinion of Congress, was resolutely opposed to taking military action in Syria. Only 24% of Americans supported U.S. military intervention to intervene in the conflict (Pew Research Center, 2013). Additionally, 74% of Americans believed that U.S. airstrikes would create an anti-American and anti-Western backlash in the region, and 61% believed any initial military action would lead to long-term military commitment in Syria (Pew Research Center, 2013).

The war-weary American public was not willing to support U.S. military intervention in the Syrian Civil War. Americans in general did not perceive the Syrian Civil War to be a war worth fighting, perhaps because the threat of negative consequences from the continuance of the Syrian Civil War was not as salient for Americans as the threat of American soldiers dying while the government spent billions of tax dollars.

## Hypotheses

Although most do not support intervention in Syria, some Americans may support U.S. military intervention in Syria if primed to implicit knowledge of a past U.S. military intervention or if their dispositional fear of terrorism is high. Research has established that priming to implicit knowledge of a successful military intervention can increase recommendation for military intervention in a new conflict (Gilovich, 1981). However, this research has not been replicated with a real conflict scenario. Also, Gilovich used a small sample of only 42 participants who were part of a very specific group, Stanford University political science majors enrolled in a course on Post-WWI U.S. Conflicts. The effect of priming to past conflicts and their effects on real, immediate conflicts needs additional support. Additionally, because research has been mixed on the relationship between fear of terrorism and support for war, the current study will address this issue. Since the effects of priming to past conflicts and fear of terrorism on support for military intervention have yet to be empirically studied together, the most unique contribution of this study is its ability to observe the combined impact that priming to past conflicts and fear of terrorism may have on support for military intervention. The salience of threats for past conflicts that involve terrorism might help resolve inconsistent research on the role fear of terrorism has in promoting support for military intervention in war.

Consistent with past research, the hypothesis of the current study is that Americans will be more likely to recommend military intervention as a conflict resolution strategy when primed to think of World War II, because World War II was a conflict in which United States intervention is credited with eliminating a formidable threat. Americans will be less supportive of U.S. military intervention in Syria when primed to think of the Iraq War, because the Iraq War was a costly war and was perceived by Americans as inadequately justified.

Another hypothesis is that fear of terrorism will be associated with increased support for war (Borgeson, 2009; Friedland & Merari, 1985; Victoroff, 2005), especially when the war involves the threat of terrorist actors. Therefore, as Americans' fear of terrorism increases, their support for military intervention will increase.

When primed to think of the Iraq War, however, the effect of fear of terrorism on support for military intervention may be exaggerated by the increase in the threat salience of terrorism associated with that conflict. As such, we predict that participants who have high fear of terrorism will be more likely to support U.S. military intervention in a Middle Eastern conflict than those with low fear of terrorism when primed with concepts reminding them of the Iraq War.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 166 University of North Florida undergraduate students. Each student was enrolled in at least one psychology course and received class credit for their voluntary and confidential participation. Although our sample was comprised of college students, implicit semantic priming is a relatively universal cognitive phenomenon (Meyer & Schvaneveldt, 1971; Tulving, et al., 1982) and is generalizable to all age and education levels. The participants identified as 19.6% male, 79.8% female, and .6% other with a mean age of 23 years old ( $SD=5.65$ ). Racially, the participants identified as 59.3% White, 12.3% Black, 14.2% Hispanic, 9.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.6% Native American, and 3.7% other, which is comparable to racial percentages in the 2013 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

### **Procedure and Materials**

Participants accessed the study via SONA (a cloud-based subject pool and research management software system), which provided a description of the research and a link to the survey on Qualtrics (an online survey management service). Participants provided informed consent in order to continue with the survey.

Participants first read a hypothetical international conflict scenario with a corresponding map. The hypothetical scenario served as the conceptual priming manipulation. In each scenario, the conflict scenario described a larger, totalitarian country preparing to invade its smaller, democratic neighbor. Each scenario contained the same structure, fundamental information, and basic descriptors. Each participant read either the neutral, World War II, or Iraq War form of this scenario. These scenarios differed only in irrelevant cues designed to implicitly prime to World War II, the Iraq War, or no particular war (neutral scenario). The neutral priming scenario can be found in Appendix A and a table of priming cues can be found in Appendix B. Maps that accompanied the priming scenarios can also be found in Appendix B. Participants took the perspective of a cabinet member of a geographically removed country that was being solicited for military aid by the country being imminently threatened by its large, totalitarian neighbor. Under this pretense, participants responded to a series of questions to assess their strategy for resolving the conflict and to what extent they would choose to provide military support for the country being threatened (adapted from Richard & Wang, 2012). Participants rated conflict resolution strategies for this conflict using a 6-point Likert scale, with the anchors “Definitely WOULD NOT Recommend (1)” and “Definitely WOULD Recommend (6)” at opposite ends of the scale. Examples of items for this scale included, “Launch a pre-emptive, all-out attack on Country A”, and “Provide humanitarian support to Country B but no military support.” These responses were not used in analysis, but maintained consistency in the survey’s flow in order to

avoid raising participant suspicions and creating demand characteristics for other measures in the survey.

The measurement for the dependent variable, support for military intervention in Syria, was contained in the next portion of the survey. Participants read a brief description of the Syrian Civil War (a non-hypothetical, current conflict), which describes the armed conflict between Bashar Al-Assad's Syrian Army and Anti-Assad rebels. The description concluded by indicating that some analysts propose that the United States intervene and provide military support to the rebels, whereas others maintain the U.S. should take a more passive strategy. This scenario description is included in Appendix C. Participants then answered a series of questions assessing their recommended strategies for resolving this conflict, including to what extent they would recommend that the U.S. provide military support for the Anti-Assad rebels. Participants indicated their preferred conflict resolution strategies in Syria and their support for military intervention in Syria by using a 6-point Likert scale, with the anchors "Definitely WOULD NOT Recommend (1)" and "Definitely WOULD Recommend (6)" at opposite ends of the scale. Examples of items for this scale include, "Launch a tactical, all-out attack on Al-Assad's government forces," "Provide strong military support to rebel coalition forces," and, "Provide humanitarian support to rebel coalition forces, but no military support."

Following the measurement of the dependent variable, participants completed a scale asking them to list their preferences for proverbs. The proverb preference scale helped mitigate the effects that the manipulation and measurement of the dependent variable may have had on other measures.

In addition to the primary dependent measure, participants completed several control measures regarding their preferred conflict resolution style and thinking style. The Rahim

Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II; Rahim, 1983) is commonly used to measure personal conflict resolution style for interpersonal conflicts. The ROCI-II is a 28-item questionnaire measuring conflict management styles. The ROCI-II measures five independent styles of handling conflict: Integrating (IN), Obliging (OB), Dominating (DO), Avoiding (AV), and Compromising (CO). The ROCI-II is measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with the anchors “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree” at opposite ends of the scale. Examples of items for the ROCI-II scale include: “When resolving conflict between myself and another person, I try to integrate my ideas with those of the other person to come up with a decision jointly,” “When resolving conflict between myself and another person, I try to keep my disagreement with the other person to myself in order to avoid hard feelings,” and “When resolving conflict between myself and another person, I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue.”

Because of the length of the ROCI-II, participants completed additional distractor items assessing “aesthetic preferences.” The aesthetic preferences scale consisted of a series of nature images with one question per picture assessing the participants’ enjoyment of the picture. The distractor task helped break the monotony of the survey and re-energize participants for the remaining questions.

The Analysis-Holism Scale (Choi, Koo, & Choi, 2007) assessed to what extent participants use a more analytical or holistic thinking style, where a higher score indicates a more holistic thinking style. This scale uses a 7-point Likert scale anchored by “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree” at opposite ends of the scale. The scale contains 24 items, including, “It is more desirable to take the middle ground than go to extremes,” “Future events are predictable based on present situations” (reverse-scored), and “It is not possible to understand the parts without considering the whole picture” (Choi, et al., 2007).



Participants then completed two subscales of the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), Tolerance for Ambiguity and Preference for Predictability. These subscales were both measured using a 6-point Likert scale anchored with the statements, “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree”. Each subscale contained 5 items, examples of which include “I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life” (reverse-scored, Tolerance for Ambiguity), and “I prefer to socialize with familiar friends because I know what to expect from them” (Preference for Predictability; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Participants then completed items measuring one of our independent variables, the Fear of Terrorism Scale (Friedland & Merari, 1985). The Fear of Terrorism (FOT) Scale measures fear of terrorism within several situations using a 5-point Likert scale anchored by “Not at all worried” and “Extremely worried”. The scale contains 4 items, “Are you worried about the possibility that you or members of your immediate family might be hurt by terrorist actions,” “Are you worried about terrorist action in the nation at large,” “Are you worried about terrorist action in your local community,” and “Are you worried about terrorist action against US citizens abroad” (Friedland & Merari, 1985). Higher scores on the FOT Scale represent higher concern and worry over the threat of terrorism. This measurement was included towards the end of our survey, which was relatively long, to ensure that the effects of the priming manipulation (which took place at the beginning of the study) would not interfere with the measurement of FOT.

Participants indicated their political views on a 7-point Likert scale from “Very Liberal” to “Very Conservative”. Finally, participants answered “yes” or “no” to the questions, “Have you ever served in the United States military or are you a part of an officer training program (such as ROTC)”, and “Has either of your parents or any of your immediate family members served in

the United States military?” As a final manipulation check of the conceptual priming, participants were asked to report any real scenario they thought of during the hypothetical scenario, although this question was not required to continue.

### Results

A factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) compared differences in mean support for military intervention in Syria (SMIS) between those with high Fear of Terrorism (FOT) and low FOT and those primed with the Iraq War scenario, the World War II scenario, and the neutral scenario. High FOT was defined as all scores above the median score and low FOT was defined as all scores below the median score. No significant main effect was found for the effect of FOT on SMIS,  $F(1, 156) = 3.31, p = .071$ . No significant main effect was found for the effect of priming scenario on SMIS,  $F(2, 156) = .82, p = .442$ .

In order to observe the simple main effects of high and low FOT on SMIS in each priming scenario, we conducted separate ANOVAs for each priming scenario (Iraq War, World War II, and Neutral). We corrected for family-wise error rate by using a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons (Bonferroni, 1936), finding that for any of the three individual comparisons a probability of .0167 for chance occurrence or less was required to reach significance. A one-way ANOVA for the Iraq War priming scenario revealed significant differences in SMIS between FOT groups,  $F(1, 54) = 9.45, \eta = .39, p = .003$ , such that participants with high FOT reported higher levels of SMIS ( $M = 3.10, SD = 1.06$ ) than those with low FOT ( $M = 2.26, SD = .98$ ). The one-way ANOVAs run for the WWII priming scenario,  $F(1, 54) = .00, p = .996$ , and the neutral priming scenario,  $F(1, 48) = .147, p = .703$ , showed no significant differences between those with either high or low FOT. These results are represented in *Figure 1*.

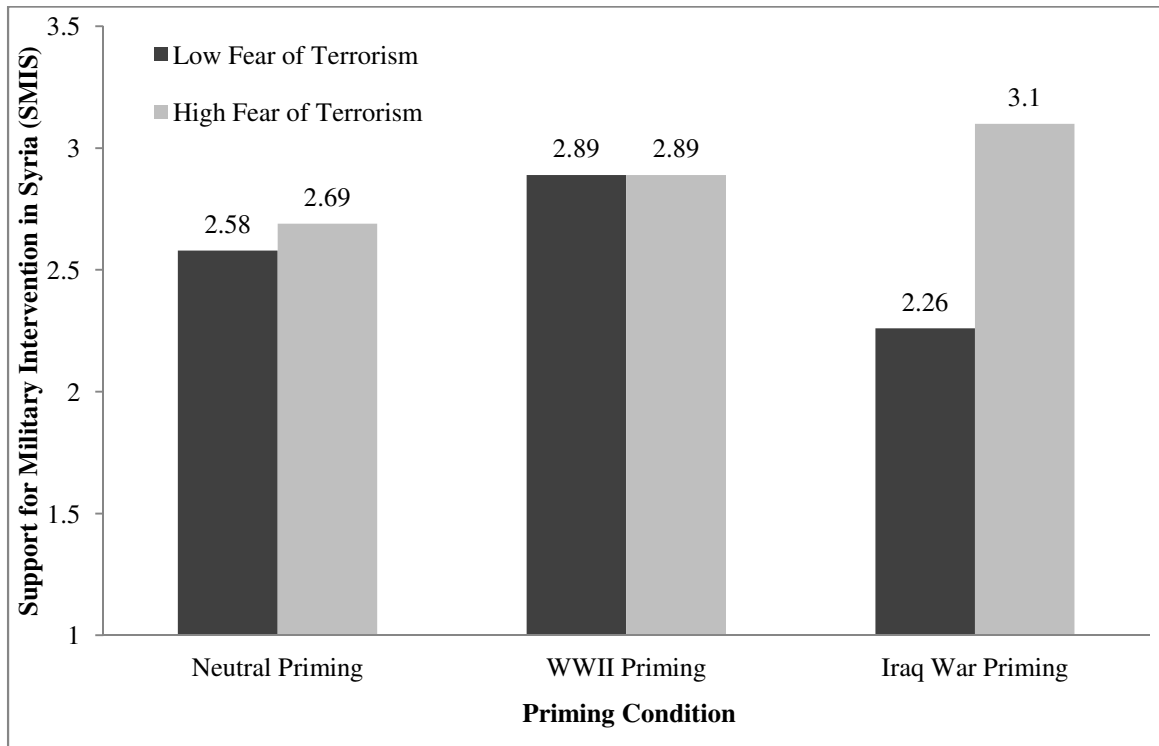


Figure 1: Mean Support for Military Intervention in Syria (SMIS) in the Neutral Priming Condition ( $n = 50$ ), the WWII Priming Condition ( $n = 56$ ), and the Iraq War Priming Condition ( $n = 56$ ) groups for those with high Fear of Terrorism and low Fear of Terrorism.

Table 1

*Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) Comparing SMIS in Participants with High and Low Fear of Terrorism*

Condition	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>η</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>p</i>
Fear of Terrorism: Neutral Priming	1	.147	.00	.703
Fear of Terrorism: WWII Priming	1	.00	.00	.996
Fear of Terrorism: Iraq War Priming	1	9.45	.149	.003**

Note: *df*= degrees freedom; WWII = World War II

\*\* $p < .01$

These results demonstrate that fear of terrorism significantly influenced support for military intervention in Syria when participants were primed to think of the Iraq War, but not

when they were primed to think of World War II or when not primed to think of any conflict in particular. These findings were further corroborated by regression analyses of FOT and SMIS performed for each priming scenario (see *Table 3*). When participants were primed to think of the Iraq War, FOT significantly predicted SMIS,  $\beta = .332$ ,  $t(54) = 2.587$ ,  $p = .012$ . FOT also explained a significant proportion of variance in SMIS scores,  $R^2 = .110$ ,  $F(1, 54) = 6.691$ ,  $p = .012$ . Regression analyses run for the WWII priming scenario,  $\beta = .053$ ,  $t(54) = .389$ ,  $p = .699$ , and the neutral priming scenario,  $\beta = -.102$ ,  $t(54) = -.710$ ,  $p = .481$ , did not show significant relationships between FOT and SMIS.

The differences in support for military intervention when participants are primed with the Iraq War might have been due to the priming scenario prompting participants to think of any Middle Eastern conflict, not just the Iraq War specifically. As a manipulation check, participants indicated if they had thought of a particular conflict during the hypothetical scenario, and if they had, they reported the conflict of which they had thought. Only 45% of participants ( $n = 75$ ) indicated that the hypothetical scenario reminded them of a particular conflict. However, this low number is not necessarily problematic, as the priming was meant to be implicit and outside of conscious thought, but could be realized consciously by some when prompted by the manipulation check question. Of those who reported thinking of a specific conflict in the neutral and World War II scenarios, 14% and 0% indicated being specifically reminded of the Iraq War, respectively. Of those who reported thinking of a specific conflict in the Iraq War priming scenario, 37% specifically reported thinking of the Iraq War and 67% indicated thinking of any conflict in the Middle East (compared to 43% and 33% for the neutral and World War II scenarios, respectively). These manipulation check results indicate that participants were more likely to think about a Middle Eastern conflict when primed with the Iraq War scenario than

when primed with the neutral scenario,  $\chi^2(1, N = 55) = 4.23, p = .04$ , Cramer's  $V = .28$  or when primed with the World War II scenario,  $\chi^2(1, N = 42) = 5.40, p = .02$ , Cramer's  $V = .36$ .

Table 2

*Percentages of Participants Who Reported that the Hypothetical Conflict Scenario Reminded Them of a Specific Conflict: WWII, Iraq War, Middle Eastern (Including Iraq), and Other*

Condition	WWII	Iraq War	Middle Eastern Conflict (Including Iraq)	Other
Neutral Priming	14%	14%	43%	43%
WWII Priming	34%	0%	33%	33%
Iraq War Priming	11%	37%	67%	22%

Note: WWII = World War II

Supplementary analyses (see *Table 3*) indicated that of our supplementary measures, including conflict resolution style (ROCI-II), the Analysis-Holism Scale, Preference for Predictability, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Political Preference, and military/family military status, only one had any significant influence on our dependent variable, support for military intervention in Syria. Scores for items that measured Obliging Conflict Resolution Style significantly predicted SMIS,  $\beta = .303, t(157) = 3.985, p < .001$ , and explained a significant proportion of variance in SMIS scores,  $R^2 = .092, F(1, 157) = 15.880, p < .001$ , such that a more Obliging Conflict Resolution Style predicted increased SMIS.

Several of these measures had a significant impact on Fear of Terrorism. Scores for items that measured Avoiding Conflict Resolution Style significantly predicted Fear of Terrorism,  $\beta = .212, t(159) = 2.734, p = .007$ , and explained a significant proportion of variance in FOT scores,  $R^2 = .045, F(1, 159) = 7.477, p = .007$ , such that a more Avoidant Conflict Resolution Style predicted increased Fear of Terrorism. Preference for Predictability also

significantly predicted Fear of Terrorism  $\beta = -.199$ ,  $t(160) = 2.574$ ,  $p = .011$ , and explained a significant proportion of variance in FOT scores,  $R^2 = .040$ ,  $F(1, 160) = 6.628$ ,  $p = .011$ , such that a greater Preference for Predictability predicted decreased Fear of Terrorism. The negative relationship between Preference for Predictability and Fear of Terrorism suggests that increased Preference for Predictability predicts decreased Fear of Terrorism. Finally, Political Preference significantly predicted Fear of Terrorism,  $\beta = .184$ ,  $t(161) = 2.372$ ,  $p = .019$ , and explained a significant proportion of variance in FOT scores,  $R^2 = .034$ ,  $F(1, 161) = 5.624$ ,  $p = .019$ , such that greater conservatism predicted increased Fear of Terrorism.

Table 3

*Correlations between FOT, FOT in Priming Scenarios, Key Supplementary Variables, and SMIS*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Avoiding Conflict Resolution Style	-								
2. Obliging Conflict Resolution Style	.345**	-							
3. Preference for Predictability	.093	.030	-						
4. Political Preference	.267**	.039	.075	-					
5. FOT: Neutral Priming	.389**	-.079	.031	.275	-				
6. FOT: WWII Priming	.182	-.009	.330*	.146	-	-			
7. FOT: Iraq War Priming	.061	.132	.221	.151	-	-	-		
8. FOT: Overall	.212**	.025	-.199*	.184*	-	-	-	-	
9. SMIS	.096	.303**	-.041	.138	-.102	.053	.332*	.091	-

Note: FOT= Fear of Terrorism; FOT: Overall= FOT across all conditions; SMIS= Support for Military Intervention in Syria

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

The positive relationship between Political Preference and Fear of Terrorism indicates that holding more Conservative political views predicts increased Fear of Terrorism. Full correlation tables of all items can be found in Appendix D.

### **Discussion**

The hypothesis in the current study was that support for military intervention in Syria would be increased when participants were primed to think of World War II and decreased when participants were primed to think of the Iraq War. It was predicted that support for military intervention in Syria would increase for participants with higher levels of fear of terrorism. The results of the study did not completely support these hypotheses. Participants with higher fear of terrorism gave significantly more support for military intervention in Syria than those with low fear of terrorism, but only when they were primed to think of the Iraq War. Priming participants to think of the Iraq War does influence their level of support for military intervention in Syria, but the direction of this influence depends on the participant's dispositional fear of terrorism.

Results of previous research on the effects of priming to past conflicts on support for military intervention show that priming to a well-supported military intervention, such as World War II, tends to produce greater support for military intervention in a new conflict than a poorly-supported military intervention, such as the Vietnam War (Gilovich, 1981). However, our results did not replicate this finding, and instead found that there was no main effect of priming scenario on support for military intervention. This lack of replication may have occurred because of the differences in size and education of the samples. Because the sample in Gilovich's (1981) study had such a specific and deep level of understanding of post-WWI American conflicts, they may have been more easily primed to think of the success of military intervention as a conflict

resolution strategy from past conflicts like WWII and the Vietnam War, as well as the salience of threats from both conflicts.

Similarly, theory suggests that increased fear of terrorism should produce greater support for military intervention (Borgeson, 2009; Friedland & Merari, 1985; Victoroff, 2005). This theory was supported, but only when participants were primed to the Iraq War. This may have been because terrorism in the specific context of a possible war elicits an increase in support for military action more easily than does terrorism that is independent of a clear threat of war. Priming the threat of war alongside terrorism may enhance the salience of the threats for loss of innocent human life, leading to support for military intervention.

The results of the current study are interpretable when considered in the larger context of the United States' recent military interventions in the Middle East and when considering how terrorism has influenced these interventions. The U.S. has recently had active military involvement in the Middle East, particularly in the areas of Iraq and Afghanistan. In both of these conflicts, fighting against terrorism was a contributory motive (Belasco, 2009). The availability and relevance of implicit knowledge of these conflicts, as well as one's dispositional fear of terrorism, seem to have some influence over Americans' decisions to support or oppose intervening in yet another Middle Eastern conflict, the Syrian Civil War.

In assessing a conflict, an individual weighs the threats associated with their nation intervening in that conflict against those associated with not intervening. If the threats on either side are perceived by that individual as significantly more salient, they will theoretically support intervening in the conflict in question. This threat salience may be key in explaining the results of this study. Each war or conflict an individual evaluates has a unique combination of threat saliences associated with opposing and with supporting intervention in that conflict; these threats



will be perceived differently by each individual and will influence their judgment. Variance in traits across many individuals, like fear of terrorism, and across situations that impact many individuals, like the activation of implicit knowledge for particular past conflicts, shifts the perception of threat salience and thereby influences decision-making. Our results show that when implicit knowledge of the Iraq War was made active, the threats that became salient for that conflict produced greater support for military intervention when participants were predisposed to fear terrorism.

Collective learning is also important in interpreting the results of this study. Priming of conceptual knowledge for a group of individuals (such as the American public) involves activating implicit knowledge and concepts that are shared by the group. Collective memory is knowledge of the past that is built collectively as a society as the society shares information over time through social organization, roles, and communication (Schumann & Scott, 1989). Collective memory leads to a form of collective learning, shared knowledge that have built up through generations and are found in the culture's language, institutions, and attitudes (Hayek, 1960). The collective societal memory of a past conflict can bias a present conflict to appear more like the past conflict than is accurate (Paez & Liu, 2011). Other research with collective memory and learning demonstrates that collective memory is distorted during times of conflict to meet the present needs of that society (Bar-Tal, 2011). For example, collective memory for conflict has been shown to be biased by justifying the outbreak and continuance of conflict, presenting one's own society in a more positive light, and presenting the enemy or rival society in a delegitimizing or negative light (Bar-Tal, 2011). Americans' have a unique collective memory for each conflict, including World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq War. Even if an individual did not directly experience these wars, theories of collective memory and learning

indicate that implicit knowledge of these conflicts would still be communicated and generally understood through shared societal functions and attitudes (Hayek, 1960; Schumann & Scott, 1989). In this study, priming participants to the collective memory of a past American conflict, like World War II or the Iraq War, would theoretically increase the frequency of implicit parallels falsely drawn between these conflicts and the Syrian civil war, including strategies for resolving them (Paez & Liu, 2011).

One explanation for the interaction between priming and fear of terrorism is that, by priming participants to the Iraq War, participants' collective memory for the Iraq War was made salient, which then biased their perception of the salience of threats for military intervention in Syria. Research shows that the Iraq War and the 9/11 terror attacks are closely tied, both conceptually and historically (Bamford, 2005). It seems that, due the proximity of the 9/11 terror attacks to the Invasion of Iraq, the American collective memory for the Iraq War includes salient threats associated with terrorism and the threat of future terrorist attacks. Therefore, by priming participants to think of the threats associated with the Iraq War, those participants who are by disposition more fearful of terrorism reported higher support for military intervention in Syria, whereas those who are by disposition less fearful of terrorism reported lower support for military intervention in Syria.

The results of the current study show that fear of terrorism was not directly related to support for military intervention but interacted with priming of past conflicts to impact support for military intervention. Perhaps the interaction occurred because being primed to the Iraq War activated implicit knowledge of terrorism (Victoroff, 2005; Borgeson, 2009), heightening the threat posed by terrorism. Like other constructs, fears and threats of terrorism become integrated into our implicit knowledge for a particular event through repeated exposure. These emotions

and threatening stimuli become associated with constructs from explicit memories. These associations over time become implicit and can have a long-term impact on behavior (Dienes & Perner, 1999).

One of our supplementary variables predicted support for military intervention in Syria directly. Those who scored higher for using an Obliging Style of Conflict Resolution on the ROCI-II tended to be more supportive of military intervention in Syria. The Obliging style of conflict resolution is associated with as having a low concern for self and high concern for other parties. Typical obliging behaviors during conflict negotiation and resolution include down-playing differences between involved parties, seeking common ground, and satisfying concerns of the other party (Rahim, 1983). Because those who use an Obliging conflict resolution style have low concern for their own interests and high concern for the interests of others, they may have been more likely to support military intervention in Syria knowing that it would aid Syrian anti-Assad rebels, even at the cost of U.S. resources and lives.

Several of our secondary variables also significantly predicted Fear of Terrorism. Political Preference had a positive predictive relationship with fear of terrorism, such that the more conservative an individual, the greater their Fear of Terrorism. This is consistent with past research showing that conservative individuals tend to have an increased fear of terrorism (DeCastella & McGarty, 2011). Preference for Predictability, a measure of Need for Cognitive Closure, had a negative predictive relationship with fear of terrorism, such that the greater an individual's Preference for Predictability, the lower their fear of terrorism. Because so much of the fear that terrorism induces is a function of its unpredictable and unexpected nature, these results are consistent with research on Need for Cognitive Closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Those who scored higher for using an Avoidant Style of Conflict Resolution according to

the ROCI-II, tend to be more fearful of terrorism. The Avoiding style of conflict resolution is defined as having a low concern for self and others in conflict resolution prioritization and is associated with behaviors such as passing-the-buck, side-stepping issues, and avoiding information about conflict during conflict negotiation and resolution (Rahim, 1983). Those who are likely to use the Avoiding conflict resolution style may be more fearful in general, including being more fearful of terrorism.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The primary limitation of this project is the possibility for a cohort effect. Most individuals in our study fall between the ages of 18 and 28 years old and have no first-hand knowledge of World War II. Additionally, some may have been too young to comprehend the events surrounding the Iraq War and the September 11 terrorist attacks. If the participants have less implicit knowledge to be primed because they lack experience with the conflicts in question, the priming manipulation might have a diminished impact. The limited age range and education level of the current sample is potentially problematic for external validity. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent the results from our sample would generalize to Americans of different ages and experiences. Americans who lived through World War II or its immediate aftermath might have been more strongly primed by the World War II scenario, leading to more support for military intervention. This supposed increase, however, likely would not be influenced by fear of terrorism, as terrorist actors were not a major concern during World War II.

Additionally, the pattern of results observed in the current study might or might not generalize to support for military intervention in other conflicts, especially those that occur outside the Middle East or for those that do not have a connection with terrorism. This study's pattern of results suggest that the Iraq War condition has not primed participants to terrorism in

general, but specifically to Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, which is highly salient for Americans' perceptions of the Iraq War. Primes suggesting a connection with the Iraq War likely would not influence support for military intervention in Northern Ireland related to terrorist-affiliated separatist movements, despite the fact that terrorism is heavily involved. However, primes suggesting a connection with the Iraq War would likely influence support for military intervention against Boko Haram, a Nigerian Islamic fundamentalist terrorist group. Perhaps priming other forms of terrorism, such as domestic terrorism, would not produce the same effect of fear of terrorism as priming foreign terrorism, and specifically Islamic fundamentalist terrorism (Borgeson, 2009).

The results of the current study would generalize to support for military intervention in other Middle Eastern conflicts, including Iraq, Iran, and Syria and in conflicts surrounding the activity of the Islamic State (IS). Americans' levels of recommendations for U.S. military intervention against IS are especially relevant, as President Obama has recently requested that the U.S. Congress authorize the use of military force against ISIS (Acosta & Diamond, 2015). Further investigation in these areas is important to generalizing our current findings and to gain a better understanding of the role that fear of terrorism and priming to past conflicts play in how people perceive, understand, and support war and other military intervention.

Investigation into the role that the media plays in the American public's perception and subsequent support of war and action against terrorist groups is also needed, as the media has a pivotal role in the creation of America's collective knowledge and memory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). Mass media provides a critical link by which individuals are able to connect their own personal knowledge to the collective knowledge of their society, in such a way that their own implicit knowledge is partly shaped by the collective knowledge they

perceive in the media (Mutz, 1998). The media also have considerable influence over public levels of fear of terrorism (Altheide, 2006; Giroux, 2007; Huddy, et al., 2003). Considering that the media seems to maintain significant influence in the creation of implicit knowledge of past conflicts as well as fear of terrorism, the findings of this study suggest that the media significantly influences Americans' support for military intervention, although further examination is necessary.

### **Conclusion**

Learning from past events, whether they are conflicts, terror attacks, or any other facet of human experience, is overall adaptive and generally helpful to survival and well-being. However, there are times when implicit knowledge or collective memories of past events can bias the assessment of new events. In this study, being presented with a new conflict and deciding whether or not to support one's nation intervening in that conflict was biased by priming of prior knowledge of past conflicts and one's fear of terrorism. This study provides evidence that it is easier than many Americans may believe to be unduly influenced by past conflicts. Threat salience that individuals have in their collective implicit knowledge of a specific past conflict may be used to as criteria for evaluating the threat salience of a novel conflict. More importantly, one's dispositions regarding key elements of the novel conflict, such as the threat of terrorism in the present study, influence how those collective memories were applied. Finally, the results of this study show evidence that Americans' fear of terrorism can polarize support for military intervention, especially when the conflict in question shares characteristics with recent Middle Eastern conflicts. The American public, like citizens around the world, should understand that information from the past may not always apply to the present. A fresh and unbiased perspective is key to accurately assessing any novel international conflict.

### References

- Abelson, R. P. (1976). Script processing in attitude formation and decision making. *Cognition and Social Behavior*, Oxford, England: Lawrence Erlbaum, xiii, 290 pp.
- Acosta, Jim & Diamon, Jeremy. Obama ISIS fight request sent to Congress. (February 12, 2015). *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/11/politics/isis-aumf-white-house-congress/>.
- Americans Oppose U.S. Military Involvement in Syria. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/162854/americans-oppose-military-involvement-syria.aspx>.
- Altheide, D. L. (2006). Terrorism and the Politics of Fear. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, 6(4), 415-439.
- Atkinson, R.C., Shiffrin, R.M. (1968). Human memory: A proposed system and its control processes. In Spence, K.W., Spence, J.T. *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation* (Volume 2). New York: Academic Press. pp. 89-195
- Bamford, J. (2005). *A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies*. Random House LLC.
- Bar-Tal, D. (Ed.). (2011). *Intergroup conflicts and their resolution: a social psychological perspective*. Psychology Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Hastings, S. (1997). Distortions of collective memory: How groups flatter and deceive themselves. In *Collective memory of political events: Social psychological perspectives*, (pp. 277-293).
- Belasco, A. (2009). Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11. *Congressional Research Service*. [www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov).

- Berkowitz, L., & LePage, A. (1967). Weapons as aggression-eliciting stimuli. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 7(2p1), 202.
- Bonferroni, C. E., (1936). *Teoria statistica delle classi e calcolo delle probabilità*, Pubblicazioni del R Istituto Superiore di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali di Firenze.
- Borgeson, K., & Valeri, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Terrorism in America*. Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Boscarino, J.A., Figley, C.R., & Adams, R.E. 2003. Fear of terrorism in New York after the September 11 terrorist attacks: Implications for emergency mental health and preparedness. *Emergency Mental Health*, 199-209.
- Bruer, J. T. (1999). Neural connections: Some you use, some you lose. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 264-277
- Cantor, N., & Mischel, W. (1977). Traits as prototypes: Effects on recognition memory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(1), 38.
- Chatard, A., Selimbegović, L., Konan, P. N. D., Arndt, J., Pyszczynski, T., Lorenzi-Cioldi, F., & Van der Linden, M. (2011). Terror management in times of war Mortality salience effects on self-esteem and governmental and army support. *Journal of Peace Research*, 48(2), 225-234.
- Choi, I., Koo, M., & Choi, J. A. (2007). Individual differences in analytic versus holistic thinking. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(5), 691-705.
- Clark, M. S., Oullette, R., Powell, M. C., & Milberg, S. (1987). Recipient's mood, relationship type, and helping. *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, 53(1), 94.
- Coleman, J. S., & Fararo, T. J. (1992). *Rational choice theory*. New York: Sage.
- Collins, A. M., & Loftus, E. F. (1975). A spreading-activation theory of semantic processing. *Psychological Review*, 82(6), 407.



- Crowson, H. M., Debacker, T. K., & Thoma, S. J. (2006). The role of authoritarianism, perceived threat, and need for closure or structure in predicting post-9/11 attitudes and beliefs. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 146(6), 733-750.
- De Castella, K., & McGarty, C. (2011). Two Leaders, Two Wars: A Psychological Analysis of Fear and Anger Content in Political Rhetoric About Terrorism. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 11(1), 180-200.
- Dienes, Z., & Perner, J. (1999). A theory of implicit and explicit knowledge. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22(05), 735-808.
- Duntley, J. D., & Buss, D. M. (2005). The plausibility of adaptations for homicide. The structure of the innate mind, 291-304.
- Friederici, A.D., Steinhauer, K., & Frisch, S. (1999). Lexical Integration: Sequential effects of syntactic and semantic information. *Memory and Cognition*. 27(3): 438-453.
- Fischhoff, B. (1975). Hindsight is not equal to foresight: The effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 1(3), 288.
- Friedland, N., & Merari, A. (1985). The psychological impact of terrorism: A double-edged sword. In *Political Psychology*, 591-604.
- Gilovich, T. (1981). Seeing the past in the present: The effect of associations to familiar events on judgments and decisions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40(5), 797.
- Giroux, H. A. (2007). Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism: Rethinking Politics in the Society of the Image. *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*, 2(1).

- Greenberg, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Solomon, S. (1986). The causes and consequences of a need for self-esteem: A terror management theory. *Public Self and Private Self* (pp. 189-212). Springer New York.
- Greenwald, A. G., & Banaji, M. R. (1995). Implicit social cognition: attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 102(1), 4.
- Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: the implicit association test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1464.
- Grossman, D. (1998). Trained to kill. *Christianity Today*, 10, 137-144.
- Grossman, D. (1999). Teaching kids to kill. *Academic Press Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press. (pp. 144-145).
- Hayek, Friedrich A. *The constitution of liberty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Hetherington, M., & Suhay, E. (2011). Authoritarianism, threat, and Americans' support for the war on terror. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(3), 546-560.
- Huddy, L., Feldman, S., Lahav, G., & Taber, C. (2003). Fear and terrorism: Psychological reactions to 9/11. *Framing terrorism: The news media, the government, and the public*, 255-78.
- Huddy, L., Feldman, S., Taber, C., & Lahav, G. (2005). Threat, anxiety, and support of antiterrorism policies. *American journal of political science*, 49(3), 593-608.
- Kahneman, D., & Riis, J. (2005). Living, and thinking about it: Two perspectives on life. *The Science of Well-being*, 285-304.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1974). *Subjective probability: A judgment of representativeness*.

In: *The Concept of Probability in Psychological Experiments* (pp. 25-48). Springer Netherlands.

Kansteiner, W. (2002). Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies. *History and Theory*, 41(2), 179-197.

Kent, G., & Keohane, S. (2001). Social anxiety and disfigurement: the moderating effects of fear of negative evaluation and past experience. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 40(1), 23-34.

Khatri, N., & Ng, H. A. (2000). The role of intuition in strategic decision making. *Human Relations*, 53(1), 57-86.

Landau, M. J., Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., Cohen, F., Pyszczynski, T., Arndt, J., Miller, C., Ogilvie, D., & Cook, A. (2004). Deliver us from evil: The effects of mortality salience and reminders of 9/11 on support for President George W. Bush. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(9), 1136-1150.

Markus, H. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(2), 63.

Marshall, R. D., Bryant, R. A., Amsel, L., Suh, E. J., Cook, J. M., & Neria, Y. (2007). The psychology of ongoing threat: relative risk appraisal, the September 11 attacks, and terrorism-related fears. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 304.

May, D. C., Herbert, J., Cline, K., & Nellis, A. (2011). Predictors of fear and risk of terrorism in a rural state. *International Journal of Rural Criminology*, v1, n1 (December 2011), p. 1-22.

- Mayton, D. M. (1987). Salience of the Nuclear Threat: Operationalization through Spontaneous Concern. *SPONS Agency, Department of Education, Washington, D.C.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (95th, New York, NY, August 29, 1987).
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- Meyer, D. E., & Schvaneveldt, R. W. (1971). Facilitation in recognizing pairs of words: evidence of a dependence between retrieval operations. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 90(2), 227.
- Mutz, D. C. (1998). *Impersonal influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect political attitudes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nellis, A. M. (2009). Fear of terrorism. *Terrorism in America*, 117-144.
- North, D. C. (1994). Economic performance through time. *The American Economic Review*, 359-368.
- Quick Facts USA 2013, (2015) *U.S. Census Bureau*.  
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>.
- Paez, D., & Liu, J. H. (2011). Collective memory of conflicts. *Intergroup Conflicts and Their Resolution—A Social Psychological Perspective*, 105-124.
- Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press RSS). <http://www.people-press.org/2013/09/03/public-opinion-runs-against-syrian-airstrikes/>.
- Quillian, M. R. (1962). A revised design for an understanding machine. *Mechanical Translation*, 7(1), 17-29.

- Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368-376.
- Rahim, M. A., & Magner, N. R. (1995). Confirmatory factor analysis of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: First-order factor model and its invariance across groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80(1), 122.
- Richard, D.F., Wang, D.-Y.D. (2012). Dialectical thinking and the resolution of social conflicts in China, Japan and the United States. Unpublished manuscript.
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1976). Understanding and summarizing brief stories. *Center for Human Information Processing*, University of California, San Diego.
- Schuman, H., & Scott, J. (1989). Generations and collective memories. *American Sociological Review*, 359-381.
- Schwenk, C. R. (1988). The cognitive perspective on strategic decision making. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(1), 41-55.
- Shariff, A.F. & Norenzayan, A. (2007). God is watching you: priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game. *Psychological Science*, 18(9), 803-809.
- Survey Reveals Scant Backing for Syria Strike. New York Times.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/10/world/middleeast/poll-majority-of-americans-oppose-military-strike.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=2&\\_hpid=hp\\_turkey%3A\\_syria%3A\\_main%3A\\_d1%3A\\_1%3A\\_1&\\_hpt=hp\\_turkey%3A\\_syria%3A\\_main%3A\\_d1%3A\\_1%3A\\_1](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/10/world/middleeast/poll-majority-of-americans-oppose-military-strike.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&_hpid=hp_turkey%3A_syria%3A_main%3A_d1%3A_1%3A_1&_hpt=hp_turkey%3A_syria%3A_main%3A_d1%3A_1%3A_1)
- Tulving, E., Schacter, D. L., & Stark, H. A. (1982). Priming effects in word-fragment completion are independent of recognition memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 8(4), 336.

- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1973). Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability. *Cognitive Psychology*, 5(2), 207-232.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. *Science*, 185(4157), 1124-1131.
- U.S. Support for Action in Syria Is Low vs. Past Conflicts. Gallup.  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/164282/support-syria-action-lower-past-conflicts.aspx>
- Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013. United Nations. 16 September 2013.
- Van't Wout, M., & Sanfey, A. G. (2008). Friend or foe: The effect of implicit trustworthiness judgments in social decision-making. *Cognition*, 108(3), 796-803.
- Vail III, K. E., Arndt, J., Motyl, M., & Pyszczynski, T. (2012). The aftermath of destruction: Images of destroyed buildings increase support for war, dogmatism, and death thought accessibility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(5), 1069-1081.
- Victoroff, J. (2005). The Mind of the Terrorist A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49(1), 3-42.
- Wanta, W., Golan, G., & Lee, C. (2004). Agenda setting and international news: Media influence on public perceptions of foreign nations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(2), 364-377.
- Webster, D. M., & Kruglanski, A. W. (1994). Individual differences in need for cognitive closure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 1049.
- Willer, R. (2004). The effects of government-issued terror warnings on presidential approval ratings. *Current Research in Social Psychology*, 10(1), 1-12.

## Appendix A

### Hypothetical Conflict Scenario: Neutral Priming

Assume you are part of the Presidential Cabinet for Country D. Your country is part of the United Nations but your country is located far from the conflict. The President of Country D has asked you for some advice about how to handle this crisis. Please thoroughly read your copy of the security briefing.

#### Security Briefing

Location: William H. Harrison Hall

Date: January 15

Time: 09:00 AM

Country B is a relatively small democratic country and is being threatened by its large, aggressive, totalitarian neighbor, Country A. This threat had been limited to internal subversion, but in the past week Country A has amassed troops and heavy weaponry on the border separating Countries A and B, and consequently the threat of armed conflict has become more probable. The attached satellite image details relevant national boundaries.

Military intelligence reports that this potentially impending invasion has been referred to as a "quick-strike" attack. Since being faced with this threat, country B has requested assistance in the form of military presence from the Country D. There is concern that Country A is not solely interested in attacking Country B, but that its ultimate aim may be to control the region overall. However, ambassadors from Country A have denied these charges stating that Country A "has no interest in obtaining any further influence in the region once the issue with country B has been settled."

If Country D was to provide assistance and armed conflict was to occur, there are significant considerations that will inform the nature of the conflict and must be taken into account.

The physical environment and landscape of the region is characterized by deciduous forests and interspersed marshlands, a temperate climate, and relatively little elevation change. If conflict were to occur, the primary means of troop transport would be regulation troop transportation trucks.

In addition, assuming conflict occurs, the majority of fighting would be concentrated in partially inhabited countryside and suburban areas. The economy of the region is made up primarily of mineral production and refinement as well as factory-based fabrication. The majority of the local population has occupations related to these activities.

Finally it is key to consider the recent history of Country A. There has been some recent civil conflict in Country A in the form of politically motivated insurgent activity.

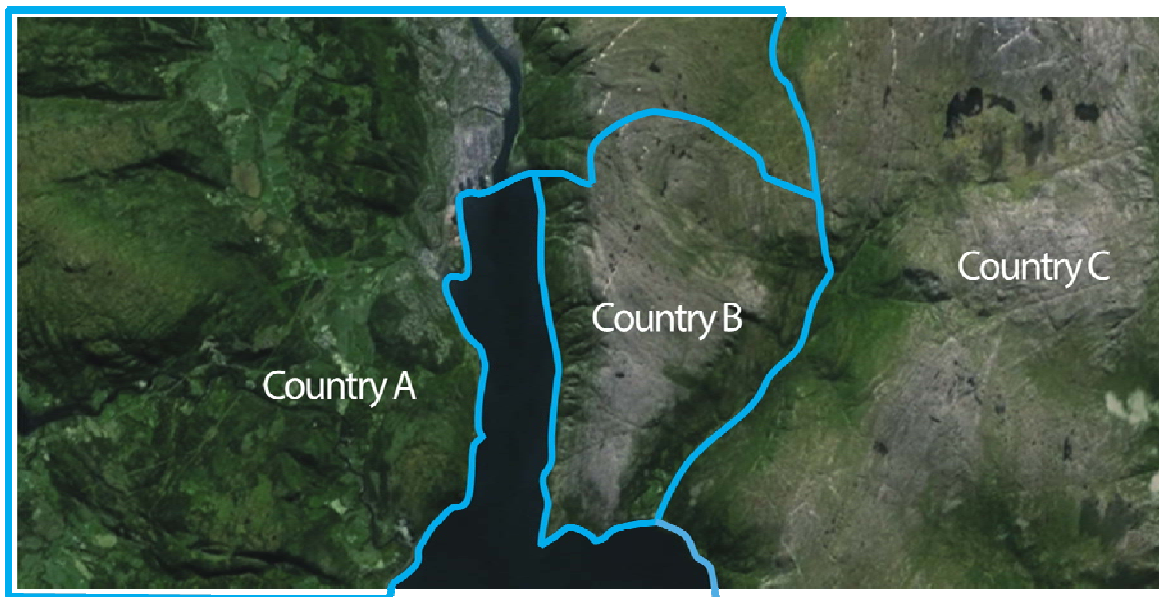
## Appendix B

**Table of Priming Cues**

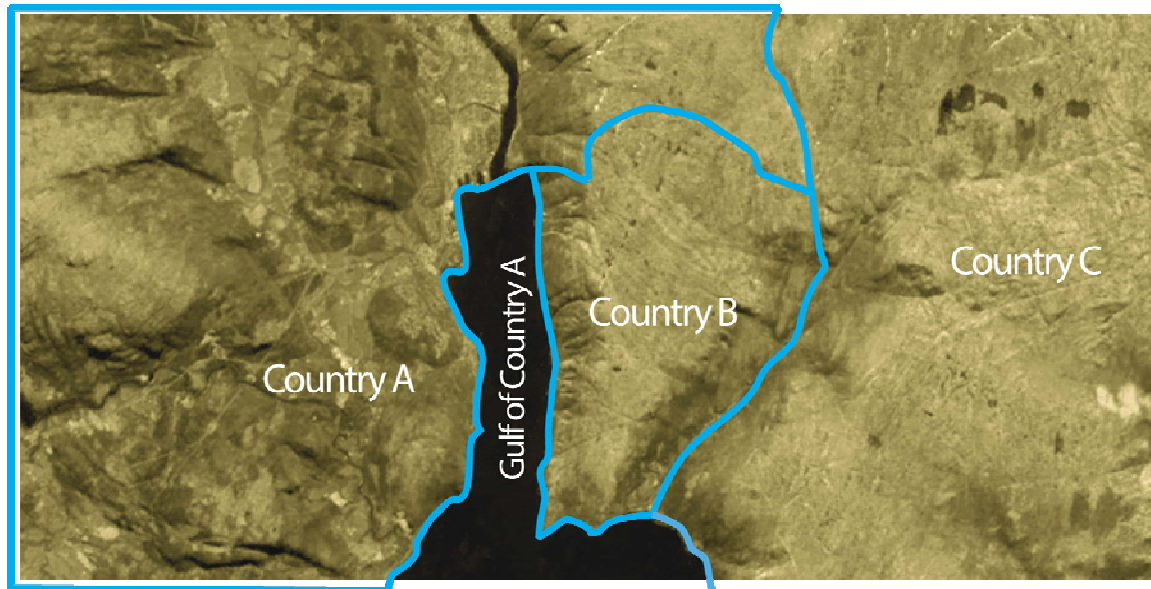
Item	World War Two	Neutral	Iraq War
Building to be briefed in	Franklin D. Roosevelt hall	William H. Harrison Hall	George W. Bush Hall
Impending invasion referred to as:	Blitzkrieg	Quick-strike	Shock and awe
Primary troop transportation:	Regulation Army Jeeps	Regulation troop transportation automobiles.	Regulation Army Humvees
Economy of local populations was predominantly centered around:	Mechanical industry	Mineral refining and factory production	Agriculture and crude oil production
The overall conflict landscape was characterized by:	Dense evergreen woodlands, snow in fall and winter, mountains, and interspersed rivers.	Temperate climate, deciduous forests and interspersed marshlands, little elevation change	Large, arid deserts, comprised primarily of sandy or rocky terrain, and occasional caves
The majority of intense conflict and contextual fighting was concentrated in:	Less developed countryside, including farmland and uninhabited forests.	Partially inhabited countryside and suburban areas	Urban, relatively populated areas, with close-quarters combat
Civil conflict involved in aggressing country prior to current crisis:	Politically and ideologically motivated ethnic cleansing	Politically motivated insurgent cells	Ideologically motivated armed conflict between religious extremists



**Map for World War II & Neutral Condition**



**Map for Iraq War Condition**



## **Appendix C**

### **Syria Conflict Scenario**

Syria is a relatively large Middle Eastern country that is situated in the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula and lies partially on the Mediterranean Sea, with a predominantly Muslim population of approximately 23 million people.

Its totalitarian ruler, Bashar Al-Assad, holds strongly negative views towards the United States and its Western allies, as well as its geographical neighbors including Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Beginning in mid-2011, groups opposed to al-Assad formed a coalition to escalate their efforts from protests and civil uprisings to formal resistance and armed insurgency against the government.

Up to this point, the Syrian Civil War has resulted in over 100,000 dead and beginning in March 2013, al-Assad's forces have used chemical weapons against rebel-held positions, resulting in many civilian casualties (according to the United Nations; [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)).

Due to escalation of the conflict and increase in civilian casualties, some analysts recommend that the United States intervene immediately in assisting the Syrian rebel forces. Others recommend a more passive strategy in mediating and resolving this conflict, maintaining that this struggle is outside of the United States' sphere of authority and that intervention will lead to negative outcomes.

## Appendix D

### *Correlations between Fear of Terrorism, Supplementary Variables, and SMIS*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Avoiding CRS	-										
2. Obliging CRS	.345**	-									
3. Compromising CRS	-.082	.433**	-								
4. Integrating CRS	.282**	-.061	.556**	-							
5. Dominating CRS	.238**	.249**	.015	-.051	-						
6. Preference for Predictability	.093	.030	.030	-.033	.076	-					
7. Tolerance for Ambiguity	.036	-.100	-.169*	-.043	-.012	-.387**	-				
8. Political Preference	.267**	.039	-.150	-.232**	.235**	.075	-.005	-			
9. AHS	.189	.132	.433**	.458**	-.159	-.105	.050	-.206*	-		
10. FOT	.212	.025	-.116	.074	-.022	-.199*	.049	.184*	-.079		
11. SMIS	.096	.303**	-.103	-.091	.057	-.041	-.054	.138	-.153	.091	-

Note: CRS= Conflict Resolution Style; AHS= Analysis-Holism Scale; FOT= Fear of Terrorism; SMIS= Support for Military Intervention in Syria

\*p< .05, \*\*p<.01

*Correlations between Fear of Terrorism in Priming Conditions, Supplementary Variables, and SMIS*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Avoiding CRS	-												
2. Obliging CRS	.345**	-											
3. Compromising CRS	-.082	.433**	-										
4. Integrating CRS	.282**	-.061	.556**	-									
5. Dominating CRS	.238**	.249**	.015	-.051	-								
6. Preference for Predictability	.093	.030	.030	-.033	.076	-							
7. Tolerance for Ambiguity	.036	-.100	-.169*	-.043	-.012	-.387**	-						
8. Political Preference	.267**	.039	-.150	-.232**	.235**	.075	-.005	-					
9. AHS	.189	.132	.433**	.458**	-.159	-.105	.050	-.206*	-				
10. FOT: Neutral Priming	.389**	.079	-.196	-.133	.154	.031	-.080	.275	.027	-	-	-	
11. FOT: WWII Priming	.182	-.009	-.008	-.080	.078	-.330*	.175	.146	-.229	-	-	-	
12. FOT: Iraq War Priming	.061	.132	-.137	-.014	-.122	-.221	.022	.151	-.178	-	-	-	
13. SMIS	.096	.303**	-.103	-.091	.057	-.041	-.054	.138	-.153	-.102	.053	.332*	-

Note: CRS= Conflict Resolution Style; AHS= Analysis-Holism Scale; FOT= Fear of Terrorism; SMIS= Support for Military Intervention in Syria

\*p< .05, \*\*p<.01